

Seacoast Veterans Help New Hampshire Veterans Home

TILTON, NH - Ralph Appleby, a retired Air Force Staff Sergeant and a member of the Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA), is on a mission.

Each month Appleby, of Portsmouth, shops for the New Hampshire Veterans Home's (NHVH) "Sunshine Cart." Ralph spends \$300.00 in Veterans Home money, and the Air Force Sergeant's Association (AFSA) kicks in an additional \$100.00. To help carry the supplies, Ralph often gets donations of big plastic bags from several Dunkin' Donuts stores in the Portsmouth area. Fred Demar, of Greenland—and a fellow Air Force Sergeants Association member, helps Ralph transport everything to the Home in Tilton. After they make their delivery, they spend time visiting with the residents and staff.



Photo: Veterans & Volunteers Fred Demar and Ralph Appleby deliver items for the New Hampshire Veterans Home "Sunshine Cart" each month.

Lisa Perry, Director of NHVH's Volunteer Program, says, "They've been doing this for over a year now. Ralph does an excellent job shopping. He's a terrific bargain hunter. He saves us a great deal of time and money! Ralph and Fred are both members of the Volunteer Service Committee, so we tie their delivery in with the monthly meeting because they travel here from the Seacoast." She adds, "I'm very, very thankful for what they provide for the Veterans Home."

Besides being active members of the AFSA, both men are also members of the Disabled American Veterans, Chapter 4. Appleby says, "It gives us a lot of satisfaction to see the pleasure these veterans get—even from the smallest things. One week I brought a US Army pen and a pin to one of the residents here at the Home. To most people it wouldn't have mattered much, but it meant so much to him."

Appleby scours the stores to stretch his dollars. "I love shopping for the Home, but I can't stand shopping for myself! Volunteering makes it a pleasure because I know how much the veterans will appreciate it."

Appleby served 20 years in the Air Force and was stationed in Vietnam from 1966 to 1967. He worked in the Air Force's fire department and eventually became the Chief Fire Inspector at Pease Air Force Base. He spends a great deal of time volunteering; he's been a member of the Air Force Sergeant's Association (AFSA) for 20 years and for ten of those years was the First

Trustee. AFSA has sponsored Christmas parades in Portsmouth, Rochester, Dover, and Exeter; in addition they've donated Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets to families of service members who are stationed in Iraq. AFSA is also raising funds for an Air Force memorial at the New Hampshire State Veterans Cemetery.

Ralph has several other volunteer commitments that are close to his heart. He regularly volunteers at "Betty's Dream," a nonprofit corporation which provides low-income, fully accessible housing for physically handicapped, mentally alert young adults capable of living in non-medical environments. He's also a Bingo volunteer at the Manchester Veterans Administration Medical Center's long term care unit.

He says, "I can't stand it when people sit around and complain. I tell them, come with me to the Veterans Home, or the VA Medical Center, or Betty's Dream. These are the people who really have something to complain about—yet they rarely do. They are the real heroes."

The NHVH Sunshine Cart provides a wide selection of personal care items to the Veterans Home residents. It is particularly important to those who are not able to participate in shopping trips because it allows them to make their own selections free of charge. The Sunshine Cart includes denture cleaning tablets, toothpaste and toothbrushes, hair combs and brushes, emery boards, body wash, pre-shave, after shave, mouthwash, lip balm, tissues, body lotion, individually packaged eyeglass cleaner wipes, hair cream, denture adhesive, and several different types of shampoo.

Sunshine Cart items are not resold to the residents, and all of the funding to purchase them comes from donations to the NHVH Resident Benefit Fund. The Veterans Home accepts monetary donations, and donors who wish to contribute should make checks payable to "NHVH Benefit Fund" and reference "Sunshine Cart" in their correspondence. For more information about the New Hampshire Veterans Home Sunshine Cart, please contact Lisa Perry at (603)-527-4449 or via e-mail at lisa.perry@nhvh.nh.gov